DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 632 JC 940 333

TITLE	Assisting Minority Students in Meeting the Requirements of the College-Level Academic Skills Test. A Report Submitted to the Florida State Board of Education by the Task Force To Improve Minority Student Performance on the CLAST.
INSTITUTION	Florida State Dept. of Education, Tallahassee. Office of Postsecondary Education Coordination.
PUB DATE	1 Dec 89
NOTE	36p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Achievement Tests; Basic Skills; *Black Students; Community Colleges; Elementary Secondary Education; English (Second Language); Enrollment Trends; High Risk Students; *Hispanic Americans; Institutional Characteristics; Institutional Evaluation; Minority Groups; Remedial Programs; Scores; Standardized Tests; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS	*College Level Academic Skills Test; *Florida

ABSTRACT

During 1989, Florida citizens, educators, and students engaged in an intensive discussion about the passing score standards for the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST), which were scheduled to increase in August 1989. There was concern that the higher requirements would result in failure rates, particularly among Black and English as a Second Language (ESL) students, that were unacceptable. These concerns were reinforced by available data indicating that Black and Hispanic students do not perform as well on the CLAST as White students. In August 1989, the Board of Education confirmed a two-step approach to the raising of CLAST passing scores and requested that an ad hoc task force be formed to study the impact of the CLAST on minorities and formulate recommendations for the improvement of minority performance on the CLAST. This report by the task force examines the literature on at-risk students and reasons for poor performance which include social influences, learner characteristics, and academic factors. Research on the impact of the CLAST on minority students is reviewed, covering: (1) 1987-88 and 1988-89 CLAST results for first-time examinees in all public institutions by ethnic group (Black, White, and Hispanic); (2) March 1988 cohort scores on essay, reading, English language skills, and mathematics; and (3) estimated student performance based on approved passing scores. The remaining sections of the report provide recommendations for K-12 education, postsecondary education, and testing and reporting. Contains 34 references. (KP)

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A report submitted to the
Florida State Board of Education
by the
Task Force to Improve
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December 1, 1989

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Task Force to Improve Minority Performance on the CLAST

Dr. Willis N. Holcombe
Task Force Chairman
President
Broward Community College
Articulation Coordinating Committee

Dr. Jose A. Alvarado
Chairman and C.E.O.
AIBC Financial Corporation
Miami-Dade Community College
Board of Trustees

Dr. Alan G. Fickett
Vice President, Marketing
Dyer, Riddle, Mills & Precourt, Inc.
Postsecondary Education Planning Commission

Dr. Richard Hogg
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Florida A & M University
Articulation Coordinating Committee

Dr. Ralph Hogges
Director
Evening/Weekend College
Florida Memorial College
Postsecondary Education Planning Commission

Mr. Cecil Keene
Occupation Counselor
St. Petersburg Junior College
Board of Regents

Mrs. Gwendolyn J. Kidney
Executive Director
Division of Student Services
Dade County School District
Articulation Coordinating Committee

Dr. Sydel B. LeGrande
Physician
State Board of Community Colleges

Dr. Paul C. Parker
Chief
Bureau of Program Support and Services
State Board of Community Colleges
Articulation Coordinating Committee

Dr. Bill Gene Smith
Professor
South Florida Community College
Highlands County School District
Board of Trustees

Dr. Bob Stakenas
Professor
Florida State University
Articulation Coordinating Committee's
Standing Committee on Student Achievement

Dr. Augustus B. Turnbull, III
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Florida State University
Articulation Coordinating Committee

Dr. Jeaninne Webb
Professor and Director
Office of Instructional Resources
University of Florida
Articulation Coordinating Committee's
Standing Committee on Alternative Ways
of Earning Credit

Mr. Gene Witt
Superintendent
Manatee County School District
Articulation Coordinating Committee

BROWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Office of the President • Fort Lauderdale Center • (305) 761-7401

November 28, 1989

The Honorable Betty Castor
Commissioner of Education
Department of Education
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Commissioner Castor:

As the final report from our Task Force was being prepared, I wanted to take the opportunity available to me as Chairman of the group to convey a few thoughts to you regarding our work and the issue of minority performance on CLAST.

First, I want to thank you for selecting me to work with this outstanding committee. To a person, the committee members set aside other priorities to make room for this assignment. We read, we argued (politely), and we decided on a number of significant recommendations which, in our opinion, will improve minority performance on CLAST. Several of our recommendations will have other very positive ramifications for improving education in Florida, both in the K-12 and higher education sectors. Each member of the committee contributed to the Report and we owe them a debt of gratitude for their diligence.

You and the other members of the State Board of Education will add this Report to the others on the topic of improving education in Florida. Many of our recommendations fit into the context of having higher expectations for our graduates, but these expectations will not be achieved without an acceptance of the costs involved. An increased financial commitment by the State of Florida to education is an important factor, but it is not the only one. What we are proposing is change, and it carries with it the costs associated with taking risks. It is my hope that you and the other key state-level decision-makers have the will to make the changes necessary to help us improve education in Florida.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of your staff who helped develop and produce this Report. In particular, Dr. Linda Owens, Dr. Tom Fisher, and Mr. Taylor Cullar deserve special mention. Please call on me if I can be of further service on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Willis Holcombe
President

Assisting Minority Students in Meeting the Requirements of the College-Level Academic Skills Test

A report submitted to the
Florida State Board of Education
by the
Task Force to Improve
Minority Student Performance on the CLAST

December 1, 1989

List of Figures

		Page
Figure One:	1987-88 and 1988-89 CLAST Results for First-Time Examinees in All Public Institutions by Ethnic Group	6
Figure Two:	Essay Test March 1988 Cohort All Public Institutions	7
Figure Three:	Reading Test March 1988 Cohort All Public Institutions	8
Figure Four:	English Language Skills Test March 1988 Cohort All Public Institutions	9
Figure Five:	Mathematics Test March 1988 Cohort All Public Institutions	10
Figure Six:	Estimated Student Performance Based on Approved Passing Scores for First-Time Examinees in All Public Institutions by Ethnic Group	11

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Review of the Literature	2
Impact of the CLAST on Minority Students	5
K-12 Education	12
Postsecondary Education	15
Testing and Reporting	18
Bibliography	21
Appendix	
Task Force Members	25
Resource Staff	27
Meeting Dates	29
Minimum Standards of College-Level Communication and Computation Skills	30

Introduction

During 1989, Florida citizens, educators, and students engaged in an intensive discussion about the passing score standards for the College-Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST). The standards were scheduled to increase in August 1989, and there was concern that the higher requirements would result in failure rates, particularly among Black and second language students, which were unacceptable.

These concerns were reinforced by available data which clearly indicate that Black and Hispanic students do not perform as well on the CLAST as White students. In addition, the projected passing rates of minority students using the new standards predicted a higher rate of failure. On August 8, 1989, the State Board of Education confirmed a two-step approach to the raising of the CLAST passing scores. In that same action, the Board requested that an ad hoc task force be formed to study the impact of the CLAST on minorities and formulate recommendations for the improvement of minority performance on the CLAST. The Task Force was formed by Commissioner of Education Betty Castor on September 18, 1989, with the charge of preparing a report to the State Board of Education by December 1, 1989.

Because the time available was so short, the Task Force did virtually no original research, but relied heavily on research and reports prepared by others who have been studying the problem of performance by minority students in our schools and colleges. The Task Force members are indebted to those whose work formed the basis of this report. Without this wealth of information, the pattern of student performance would not have been so clearly depicted. With this extensive body of work, the Task Force was able to base its deliberations on these data as well as the perceptions of its members.

The Task Force also wishes to emphasize that the effort to improve passing rates on the CLAST is a means rather than an end in itself. The ultimate objective is to improve students' mastery of educational skills that are critical to success in college. Moreover, the Task Force notes that most of these same skills are also necessary for productive employment in today's society. The educational system in Florida should re-examine practices that allow or encourage students to avoid challenging middle and high school courses with the excuse that these students are not going to college. Data reflect that many students who did not initially plan to go to college do, in fact, attempt college-level work, and almost all will be seeking jobs where employers will demand competence in the CLAST skills.

The discussion and recommendations contained in this report range from being very specific to being very broad. Likewise, some of the changes recommended can be made quickly while others will take time to accomplish. Some are targeted toward local decision-making, others toward statewide policymaking. All are based on the objective of improving minority student performance in school and on the CLAST. All of the Task Force members consider this objective one of the most important, if not the most important, issues facing the future of education in Florida.

Review of the Literature

This section summarizes what current professional literature says about minority performance or, more broadly, what is known about the performance of at-risk students, many of whom are minority students. Its purpose is to identify causes of poor performance and the services which can be implemented to improve performance.

Generally, the literature describes three reasons for poor minority student performance. These include (1) social influences, (2) learner characteristics, and (3) academic factors. Each of these will be discussed in the following pages.

Social Influences

In an attempt to understand variations in student performance, researchers have analyzed data relating achievement to many social factors. These include ethnic status, gender, birth order, socioeconomic status, and education of parents, to name just a few.

Garcia (1985) discusses the performance of minority examinees on a test used to screen candidates for teacher training programs in Texas. He found that Hispanic-Americans whose primary language was not English had particular difficulties with the test requirements. He suggests that second language students do not get sufficient practice with the majority language in their home setting. Low performance was also related to lack of parental interest in the child's schooling, lower academic expectations, and lower family socioeconomic status.

Beltz and Geary (1984) found that paternal occupation was related to significant differences in scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Father-absent male students were found to have lower mathematics scores than father-present male students, but the differences were not found in verbal scores. Students whose fathers were employed in cultural and scientific occupations earned the highest SAT scores.

Comer (1983) discusses the problems faced by single-parent Black families and how this affects all areas of life, including education. Three to four times as many Black families as White families are headed by single, mostly female, parents. Comer suggests that well-meaning leaders may not be able to understand the fundamental causes of the problems facing minority students and, therefore, are not able to plan effective solutions. He recommends increasing the focus on the family. Great effort should be made to create the appropriate "mind-set" among Black youth and to teach them how to avoid trouble and solve problems that occur in life. In a later article, Comer (1984) provides a list of recommendations for action by various groups, including educators. In general, he recommended strengthening the family unit, providing counseling services, and involving the community in educational matters. The Florida Institute of Education (1988) reached similar conclusions about the educational success of Black students. The Institute notes that Black students who graduate from high school are likely to have had strong family and church support. They have "experienced success and goal achievement" (p. 8).

Learner Characteristics

Variations in student performance may also be attributed to cognitive and affective factors.

A number of authors suggest that Black students may process information in a different way from White students. Shade (1982) notes that present school curricula emphasize cognitive strategies "that are designed as sequential, analytical, or object-oriented" (p. 238). However, Black learning patterns seem to be more intuitive. These differences may work to the disadvantage of Black students in academic settings.

McCaig (no date) has proposed a model for understanding the cognitive variables which affect the achievement of high-risk students. The cognitive factors include intellectual and self-regulation variables. High-risk students are characterized by insufficient prior knowledge, information processing skills, background experiences, learning strategies, fact retention, study methodology, use of resources, and test preparation, to name a few.

Affective factors also influence performance. The American Association of School Administrators (no date) states that poor attitude is related to poor achievement. Poor school experiences lead to discipline problems, in-school suspensions, and eventual dropping out of school.

Banks, et al (1978) in writing about the achievement orientation of Black students state that several researchers have found that minority students are more often motivated by extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards. Most students complete a transition from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards for school work early in their education. Many minority students fail to make this transition, thus leading to later difficulties in educational achievement.

McCaig (no date) classifies affective variables related to school achievement into two categories: psycho-social, self-system variables and arousal variables. Poor performing students are characterized as having low expectations and values, low academic effort and persistence, anxiety about academic performance, and perceptions of academic incompetence.

Academic Factors

Test results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that Black students have made gains in achievement over the last ten to fifteen years. In fact, Black students at all age levels tested have improved their performance at a faster rate than Whites have (Beratz-Snowden, 1987).

Achievement data at the postsecondary level are more difficult to obtain since most testing programs are voluntary. Data from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) reveal that Black students' scores are improving, and the gap between Black and White performance is decreasing. However, if the rate of improvement continues at its present level, it will be the year 2045 before the gap has disappeared (p. 53). Data from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) indicate that the scores of the most capable Black students are improving, but there has been a drop in the performance of students in the middle of the distribution.

As the nation moved toward equality of educational opportunity beginning in 1965, schools did more to encourage minority students to enroll and admitted many students into programs despite evidence that their skills may have been deficient (Blake, 1987). Much has been gained by these efforts; however, in the face of increasing emphasis on academic standards, schools have to be more alert to factors which can enhance the performance of minority students once they are enrolled.

Blake's solution to this problem is to increase funding to schools that enroll large numbers of minority students. He would provide additional funding to two-year colleges and to universities to enable them to provide needed services to minority students. However, he is not specific about what services are helpful.

Wilson (1986) states that students attending inner-city public schools all too often are denied the same opportunities as other students. Inner-city schools are likely to have inadequate primary and elementary programs, fewer teachers, more poorly prepared teachers, fewer counseling resources, and less equipment. Minority students drift into general courses and graduate without having taken college preparatory courses.

Levine, et al (1984) reported on efforts to improve the educational programs in inner-city schools. Their research concentrated on the organization to improve reading skills, emphasize higher-order skills, emphasize personal development, and maintain high expectations. These efforts apparently have been successful in the participating schools.

Greer (1986) reports on efforts to improve the education of students in the District of Columbia. This new program for at-risk students includes summer school, after school tutorial sessions, volunteer tutors, computer-assisted instruction, and special classes for students who have not been promoted. The results were very positive.

Abrams and Jernigan (1984) investigated the performance of high-risk students entering postsecondary studies. They found that traditional entrance/selection criteria did not predict accurately which students would be successful at the end of the first semester of work. However, evidence was found that those students who willingly sought assistance from their teachers and tutors were more likely to be successful. The authors conclude that institutional policies should require high-risk students to participate in support services that are available on the campus.

Kulik, Kulik, and Swalb (1983) prepared a summary of sixty college programs that appear to be successful for at-risk students. They reviewed services which included academic skills instruction,

guidance sessions, comprehensive support services, and remedial/developmental studies. Their analysis shows, generally, that such services were helpful to the at-risk students, both in terms of grade-point averages and persistence in school. However, the effect was greatest for guidance sessions and least for remedial studies. As the authors state, "Developmental and remedial studies may be too unchallenging to prepare students adequately for regular college courses" (p. 409).

More importantly, Kulik, Kulik, and Swalb found that many schools were better at establishing such programs than they were at maintaining them. Without sustained effort and careful monitoring of progress, there is little hope that programs for at-risk students will be successful over the long term.

Summary

To summarize, there is substantial evidence that minority students' scores are lower than White students' scores on achievement tests. Although the gap between minority and majority student performance is decreasing and minority students are making great strides forward, the gap in performance persists, and educators must make further efforts to close it.

The problem of poor performance by minority students can be traced to many factors: some within society, some within the learner, and some within the institution. No single solution will alleviate the problem, but actions can be taken which will improve student success rates.

Successful, established practices indicate that students must be helped at a very early age and carefully monitored throughout their educational careers. High expectations, as well as the provision of special counseling services, are key factors. Students must be guided into the proper courses very early, or they will never have the opportunity to take college preparatory courses in high school.

Impact of the CLAST on Minority Students

The purpose of this section is to describe the performance of Black and second language students on the CLAST. It includes both the recent history of actual test data and the projected results under the new standards. Since the CLAST was initiated, minority student performance has consistently been lower than the performance of majority students. Figure 1 depicts the performance of Black and Hispanic first-time takers of the CLAST in 1987-88 and 1988-89 in comparison to White first-time test-takers. Figure 1 shows the annual pass rates for each of the four CLAST subtests for the last two years. Clearly, the data reveal that the percentage of Black and Hispanic students passing each of the CLAST subtests is lower than the percentage of White students passing.

These CLAST data are consistent with the pattern of poorer performance for minority students in other testing programs, both in Florida and nationally. For example, minority student performance has been poor on the State Student Assessment Tests (SSAT) and the Florida Teacher Certification Examination. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has documented poorer performance among minority students.

However, tracking the results of first-time takers of the CLAST does not reveal a complete picture of current student performance. Figures 2 through 5 display the longitudinal performance of all students as well as for White, Black, and Hispanic students on each of the CLAST subtests including the results for students who retake the subtests which were failed earlier. Figure 2 shows the results for the Essay subtest for a single group of students who began taking the test in March 1988. This cohort group was followed through a total of five administrations to monitor how the total percentage of students passing the Essay subtest increased. Clearly, the data reveal that Black student performance is the lowest among the four groups, but, also, the performance of this group increased at a faster pace than the others upon retaking the test.

Similar trends are seen in Figures 3 through 5 for the Reading, English Language Skills, and Mathematics subtests. The data show the performance of students relative to the passing standards which were in effect in March 1988. These longitudinal analyses clearly show that the retaking of subtests leads to significant improvements in the pass rates of all, but particularly Hispanic and Black, students.

With the State Board of Education's approval of the interim 1989-90 passing scores and the 1990 passing scores, the projected pass rates for all students change dramatically. While we must be cautious because these projections are based on the performance of students tested under the 1986-88 standards and it is uncertain exactly how students will respond to the higher standards, this is the best information available at this time.

Given the higher passing score requirements, it is projected that the passing rates for all students will decrease. However, the impact on minorities will be much more severe. Figure 6 depicts these anticipated passing rates. The performance of Black and Hispanic students is likely to continue to be below that of White students on each of the subtests and all four subtests.

Further, Figure 6 shows that when the 1990 standards go into effect, the performance of Black students will possibly fall to 44% passing the Mathematics subtest and to 42% passing the Essay subtest. These rates of performance are for students who are taking the test for the first time and these two subtests will continue to be the ones which present the most difficulty for minority students. The cumulative passing rates for all four subtests are of greater concern. Only 48% of all first-time examinees are projected to pass all four subtests of the CLAST beginning in the fall of 1990. While this overall pass rate is discouraging, the Black and Hispanic pass rates are far worse, 21% and 30% respectively. As previously shown in Figures 2 through 5, we can expect improvement in pass rates as the subtests are retaken. Nevertheless, the impact of higher passing scores on Hispanics and Blacks will be severe. It should also be noted here that the percentage of Hispanic and Black students in Florida's public schools is increasing, and it is anticipated that this trend will continue into the next century. Thus, the impact of the CLAST on minority students will be compounded unless minority student performance rates improve.

Figure One

1987-88 and 1988-89 CLAST Results for First-Time Examinees in All Public Institutions by Ethnic Group

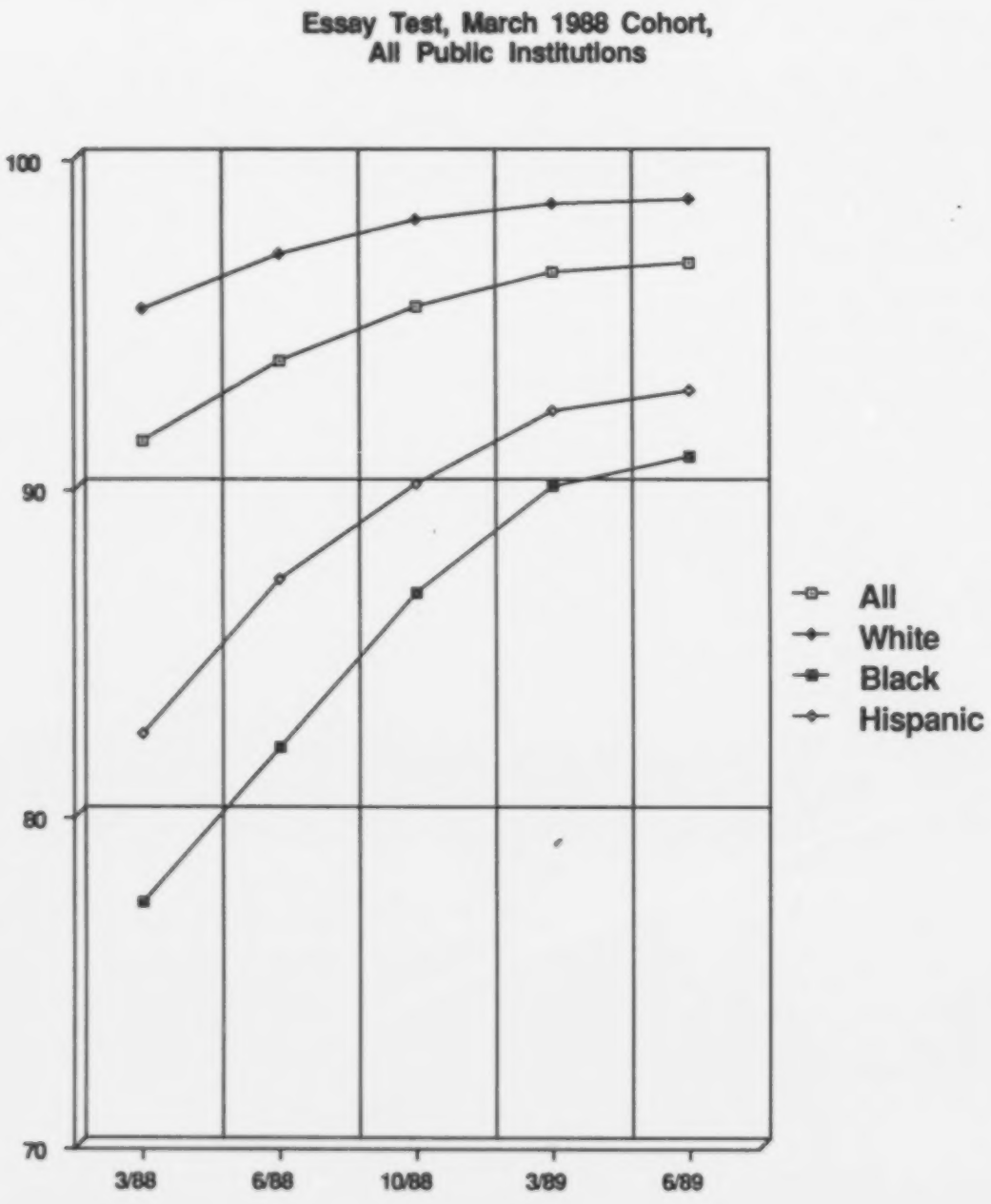
	1987-88				
	Essay	Eng. Lang.	Read-ing	Math	All Tests
All	92	97	93	93	83
White	96	99	97	95	89
Black	78	90	76	77	56
Hispanic	84	93	88	88	71

	1988-89				
	Essay	Eng. Lang.	Read-ing	Math	All Tests
All	92	96	96	90	83
White	97	99	99	94	90
Black	81	90	86	70	58
Hispanic	82	91	91	82	68

Source: Florida Department of Education. *CLAST Statewide and Institutional Report of Results 1987-88.* Tallahassee, FL: Author, 1988.

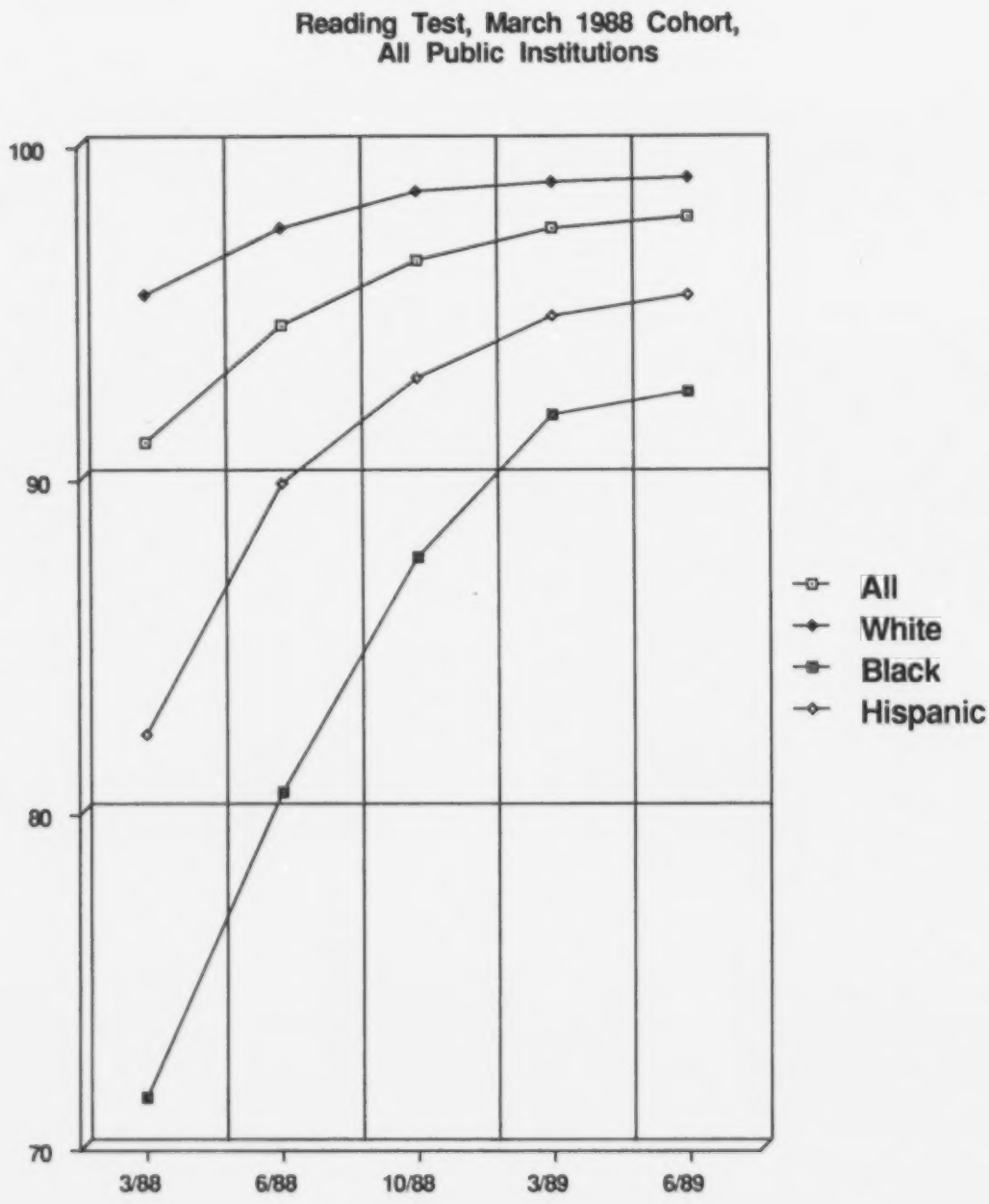
Florida Department of Education. *CLAST Statewide and Institutional Report of Results 1988-89.* Tallahassee, FL: Author, 1989.

Figure Two



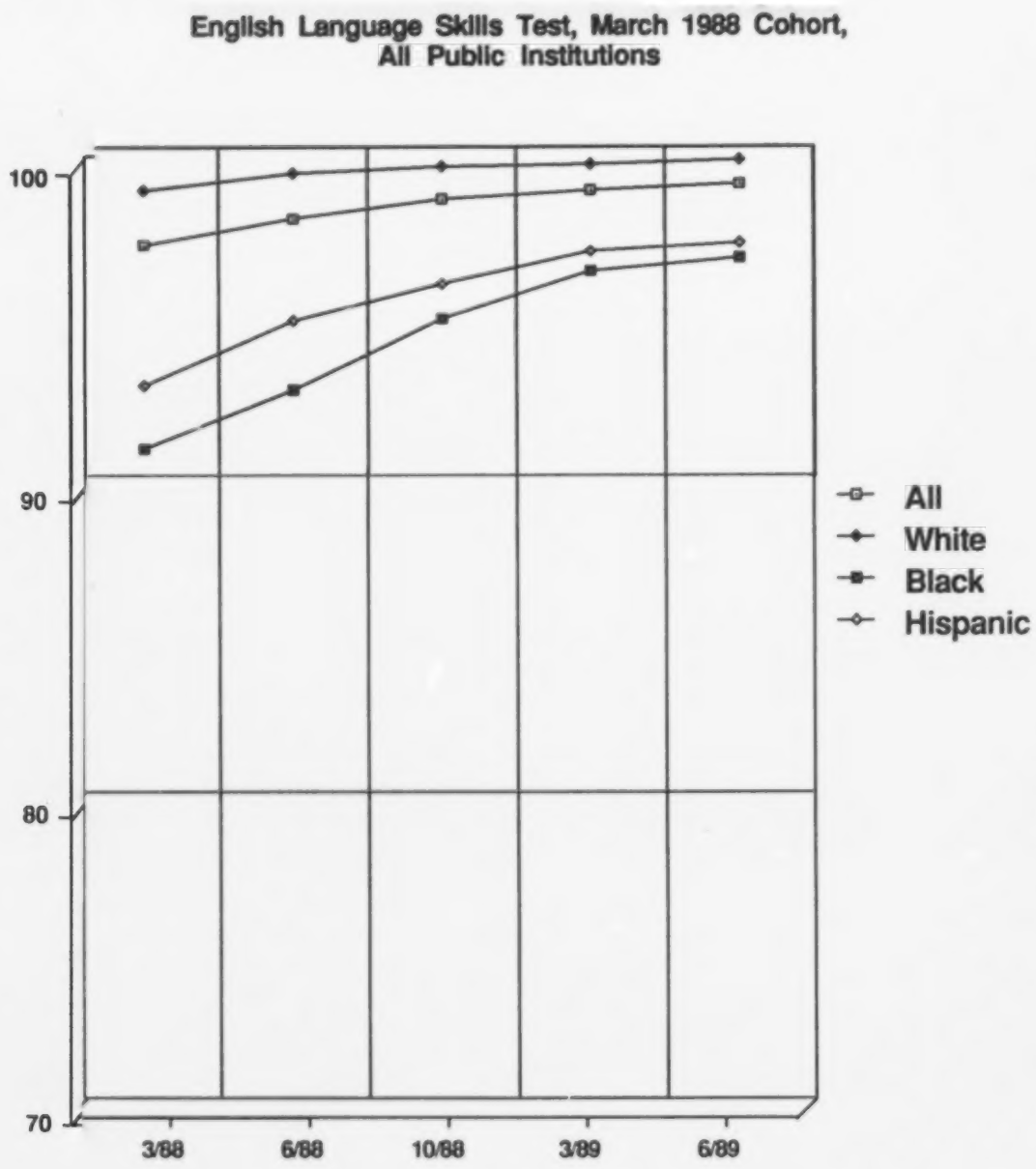
Source: Assessment, Testing, and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, October 1989.

Figure Three



Source: Assessment, Testing, and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, October 1989.

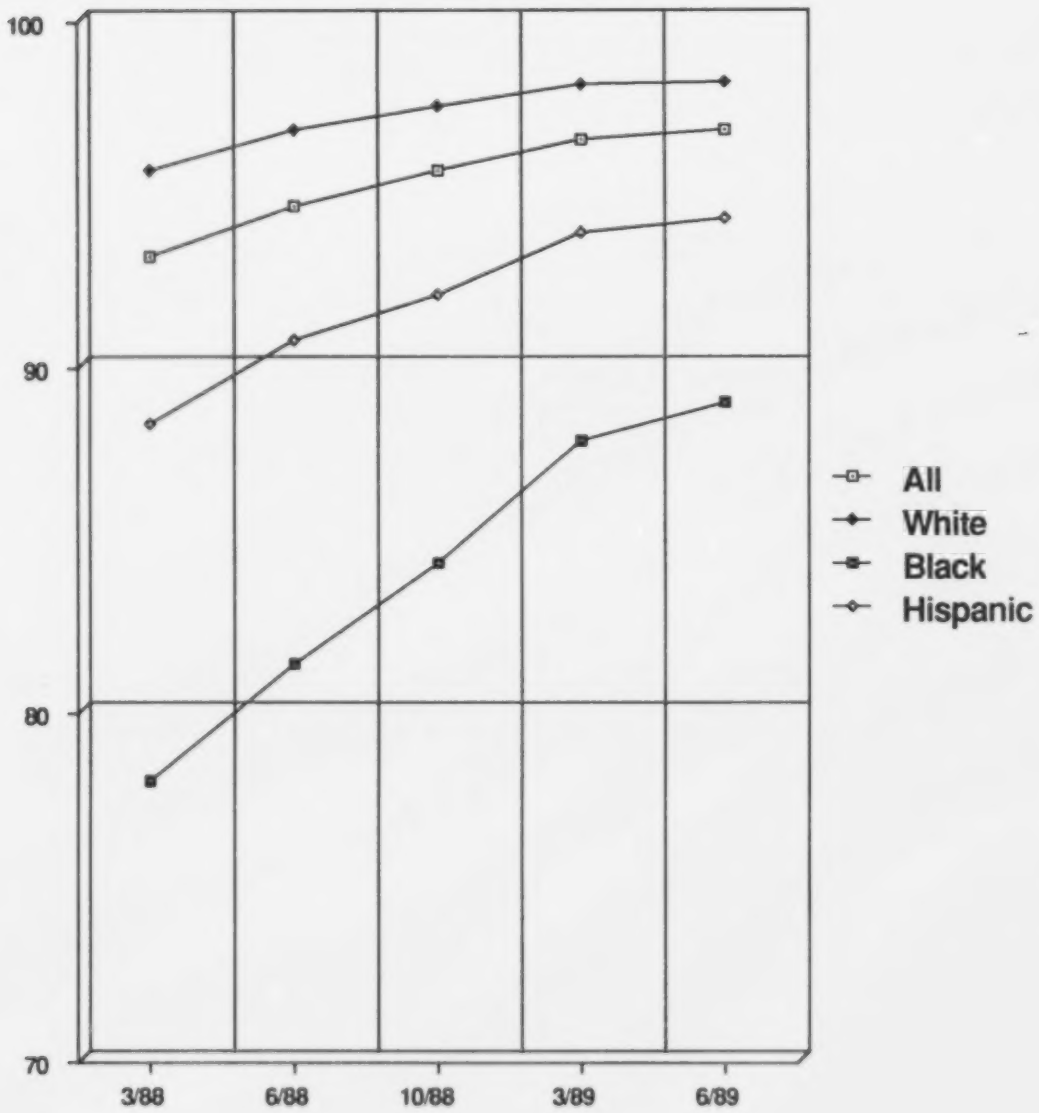
Figure Four



Source: Assessment, Testing, and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, October 1989.

Figure Five

Mathematics Test, March 1988 Cohort,
All Public Institutions



Source: Assessment, Testing, and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, October 1989.

Figure Six

Estimated Student Performance Based on Approved Passing Scores for First-Time Examinees in All Public Institutions by Ethnic Group

Mathematics	1989-90	1990 Forward
All	86%	73%
White	90%	78%
Black	63%	44%
Hispanic	76%	61%
English Language Skills	**1989 Forward**	**(Same)**
All	82%	
White	87%	
Black	61%	
Hispanic	69%	
Reading	**1989 Forward**	**(Same)**
All	87%	
White	93%	
Black	65%	
Hispanic	75%	
Essay	**1989-90**	**1990 Forward**
All	92%	64%
White	97%	70%
Black	81%	42%
Hispanic	81%	46%
All Four Tests	**1989-90**	**1990 Forward**
All	Not available	48%
White	Not available	55%
Black	Not available	21%
Hispanic	Not available	30%

Source: Assessment, Testing, and Evaluation Section, Florida Department of Education, October 1989.

K-12 Education

From the student perspective, public education is a continuum of experiences that help the student prepare to enter our society. A casual observer is able to see that some public school graduates are more prepared to enter the work force and continue their education at the postsecondary level than others. Many factors, including student choice, are beyond the control of Florida's public school system and affect student performance. Some would contend that these factors are much stronger than the impact made on students by the schools. Virtually all public school students will become Florida citizens whether or not they succeed educationally. The results of poor student performance in public schools extend over a lifetime for the individual and the society in which he or she lives. It is in the best interest of our citizens and the State to put our efforts into doing the best we can educationally for all students in the most focused way we can.

It is in this light that the Task Force considered several recommendations for change in the K-12 education system to enhance minority student success, both in high school and ultimately on the CLAST. However, even though the goal of this Task Force is to improve minority student performance, majority at-risk students would certainly benefit as well from the implementation of these recommendations.

It is clear from the research that there is an interrelatedness of student performance as the student moves through the various educational levels. Prekindergarten experiences influence student readiness to start school. The elementary experience is the foundation for the middle school program, and performance in the middle school is the basis of secondary school learning. Likewise, secondary school learning is the foundation for all postsecondary programs.

Florida has addressed the problem of at-risk children with the Primary Education Program (PREP), begun in 1979. PREP requires that all children, K-3, be screened for physical, social, emotional, and intellectual deficiencies upon their first admission into a Florida public school. After further assessment, students are assigned to one of three levels of strategies - preventive, developmental, or enrichment. These strategies are reviewed at regular intervals, and adjusted as necessary. Progression from grade 3 to grade 4 is based upon the satisfactory achievement of a specific set of basic skill competencies. Such an approach clearly defines expectations and facilitates the development of early intervention strategies to address skill deficiencies. It is recommended that this program be extended to grades 4 and 5 to assure that minority and at-risk students have every opportunity to achieve their educational potentials.

The Minimum Student Performance Standards have had a significant impact on the elementary curriculum in basic skills. However, emphasis should be placed on the development of higher level skills, not on rote memorization and computation. It is recommended that the Department of Education Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education continue to review the standards and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics to upgrade instruction in the elementary schools.

To address the need for a strong beginning to a minority child's educational program, the Task Force recommends:

1. **The public schools should encourage minority parents and guardians to be involved in their children's education. The public schools should work with the parents of minority students to motivate and assist their children at an early age to be successful in school.**

2. **The State Board of Education should make the funding of prekindergarten programs in the public schools a high priority and work with the Legislature to provide funding to expand prekindergarten programs so that more minority students have access to these programs.**

3. **The Department of Education should provide leadership in cooperation with the public school districts in the development of curriculum guidelines for grades K-3 and grades 4-5. It is recommended that the Department of Education Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education continue to review the standards and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics to upgrade instruction in the elementary schools. The public schools should continue to expand early intervention programs to address skill deficiencies among students.**

What may be less evident than the interrelatedness of education experiences is the interrelatedness of the skills necessary for success in college and success in the world of work. Recent surveys and interviews with employers confirm that the same basic skills necessary for performance in college are important for employment. As a result, one of the primary goals contained in the Commissioner of Education's *Blueprint for Career Preparation* is that students graduating from Florida's public high schools should be prepared to begin a career and continue their education at a postsecondary technical school, community college or university. The curricula and testing programs at all levels of public education should be coordinated so that students are prepared in a goal-directed fashion toward the achievement of higher standards of excellence in general and in the basic skill areas in particular.

There is a demonstrable relationship between high expectations and high achievement. Since the 1960's, our public school system has attempted to be responsive to the needs of individuals and to standards of excellence dictated by each community. The result of such an approach has been an inconsistent standard of what should be expected of a Florida high school graduate. For example, each student may choose from broad subject areas a menu of courses in developing their high school program of study. Also, these courses may be offered on several different levels with significantly disparate expectations in terms of student learning. Through this process, many high school graduates have not taken the appropriate courses to prepare them for college or the work force. This is compounded by the fact that many students do not make a decision to attend college until it is too late to enroll in all of the appropriate courses as a part of their K-12 experience. It is clear that these students will continue to be at a disadvantage after high school and will very likely remain underachievers due to inadequate preparation.

The system does not send a clear message to the student of high expectation. The RAISE bill was initiated by the Legislature in 1983 to define higher expectations for high school graduates. However, students can meet the course requirements in the RAISE bill without being challenged. The student can pass the required state tests for a high school diploma with skill levels unacceptable to higher education and Florida employers.

The state universities have specified the completion of courses in specific subject areas as a part of the university admission criteria. However, Florida's community colleges have an open door policy for all Florida high school graduates without regard to whether the student has completed appropriate college preparatory courses. The net result is that students are unable to see a clear set of expectations for college preparation and admission. Many students enter the community colleges without having taken appropriate college preparatory courses.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends the following actions to increase the expectations for student performance in the secondary schools:

1. **The curricula for public school education should be improved to prepare all students to achieve higher levels of competency in reading, writing, and mathematics so that students graduating from Florida's public high schools are prepared to begin a career and continue their education at a postsecondary technical school, community college or university.**

2. **The curricula and testing programs at all levels of public education should be coordinated to provide a continuum of skill development and assessment to assure the achievement of higher standards of excellence. The public school curriculum and testing programs should assess each student's attainment of the desired skills and provide feedback to students, parents, and educators so that skill deficiencies can be addressed prior to high school graduation.**

3. **The public schools and postsecondary institutions should work collaboratively to advise students and parents how students can effectively prepare for success in college. The public school guidance counselors should advise all students with college potential to enroll in the courses included in the specific subject areas required for admission to the State University System. The courses should be taken even if the student plans to attend a community college first.**

4. **The public schools should provide successful minority role models for students and hire more minority teachers and guidance counselors.**

5. Educational materials used in the public schools should reflect minority participation in and contributions to society.

6. Public school teachers and guidance counselors should receive training, either preservice or inservice, to prepare them to adequately deal with students from multicultural backgrounds.

7. The public schools should develop programs to recognize and reward teachers and counselors who are successful in improving minority student achievement.

8. The Department of Education should develop and the Legislature should fund an incentive program to provide additional funding to public school districts to develop specific programs that will target minority students who have an interest in attending college and provide these students with instructional and support services to assist them in acquiring the necessary skills for college. Funds should be made available to school districts for the implementation of pilot programs that can be replicated throughout the state.

Postsecondary Education

When college preparatory instruction was established as a category of instruction for the community colleges and Florida A & M University in the early 1980's, it was thought that the need for such instruction would be eliminated or reduced greatly by 1990. As we approach the year 1990, it is clear that this prediction has not come true. In fact, there is more college preparatory instruction provided today than when the program was first established. It is clear that students who do not pass the entry-level placement tests do not have as good a chance of passing the CLAST as those who pass the placement tests. Minority students are highly represented among those who do not pass the placement tests, and, therefore, their problems with the CLAST are consistent with past academic performance.

Since eight of the nine state universities are not allowed under state policy to offer college preparatory instruction directly, and since many CLAST skills are first taught at the precollegiate level, it is difficult for these universities to directly assist students lacking in specific CLAST skills. The community colleges, too, do not receive categorical funding to provide CLAST skills instruction apart from regular coursework. The logic behind these prohibitions has been the assumption that these deficiencies would be corrected in the K-12 system. Our recommendations in the preceding sections are designed to reinforce this policy objective, but more must be done.

Many students who take the CLAST are not recent high school graduates. They are adults returning for a college education, often after not taking a college preparatory high school curriculum. If these students are to be given realistic access to our community college system, our community colleges should be allowed, encouraged, and funded to offer precollegiate, CLAST preparatory skills instruction on an intensive basis.

Studies of Florida's community colleges indicate that success with minority students in college preparatory instruction and preparation for the CLAST varies among the institutions. While the CLAST is a statewide requirement for students, preparing students for success on the test is highly dependent upon the emphasis given this task in each institution. Despite the fact that the CLAST results provide meaningful information for use in analyzing the effectiveness of instructional programs, there is little evidence that this is being done systematically in all postsecondary institutions.

Many postsecondary institutions provide instructional and support services for minority students. Much sharing of strategies among the institutions is done and workshops are held statewide to encourage dialogue on this important issue. In addition to college preparatory instruction, a variety of other resources and services which address CLAST skills are available to students. These services are provided despite the fact that there is no direct funding to the institutions for this purpose. However, these services are not often made a required part of the curriculum for minority students nor are they consistently available across the colleges.

Despite the efforts to provide services designed to assist minority students, there is a more fundamental difficulty in the teaching of the CLAST skills. Since some of the skills are taught in precollege-level courses, not all CLAST skills are routinely encountered as part of the community college or university curriculum. As a result, it is not clear to students which skills are taught in which courses. This not only makes it difficult for students to know which courses will provide good preparation for the CLAST, but the faculty also are unsure on this same issue. Each community college and state university should identify where in the curriculum each of the skills being taught is contained and assure that the faculty members teaching those skills are aware of their responsibilities, whether they be full-time or part-time.

Since the CLAST provides excellent feedback information for the institution and the faculty member, the opportunity for using achievement data to improve performance is clearly present. In actuality, however, there is very little consistency from faculty member to faculty member on the teaching of the skills. The assignment of faculty to courses containing significant numbers of CLAST skills may not be made on the basis of who is best prepared and willing to teach those courses. Some college and university faculty who teach CLAST courses do not have the preparation or the desire to deal with the teaching of skills that are considered to be precollegiate.

As a result, while the policy position of the State of Florida is that our institutions should strive to be inclusive by helping students to achieve prescribed standards, many of the funding strategies and practices in our institutions result in an exclusionary system. Florida historically has had a strong commitment to ensuring access to higher education, but the reality is that this commitment requires that extraordinary steps be taken to provide the extra assistance and multiple opportunities many minority students need in order to be successful. Failure to take these steps will result in access without opportunity for many minority students.

The Task Force recommends that the following be done to improve the performance of our community colleges and state universities in regard to preparing minority students for the CLAST:

1. The State Board of Education should make the funding of special CLAST activities a high priority and work with the Legislature to provide a base of services for minority students at all community colleges and state universities .

2. Each postsecondary institution should develop programs to direct students at risk of failing the CLAST to appropriate instructional and support services. Student tracking should be a part of this program so that students are not allowed to "slip through the cracks."

3. Those community colleges and state universities that do not already have one should prepare an institutional plan which outlines the strategies which will be used to improve the performance of all students and particularly minority students on the CLAST. This plan should contain a detailed description of the approach to be taken, the goals to be achieved, and the evaluation to be done.

4. The Department of Education should develop and the Legislature should fund an incentive program to provide additional funding to postsecondary institutions who do the most to improve minority student performance on the CLAST. Evaluation criteria should include the number and percentage of minority students who attempt and pass the CLAST as well as improvement over time.

5. Each postsecondary institution should evaluate the relative effectiveness of its intervention strategies for students referred to college preparatory instruction. One evaluation criterion should be student performance on the CLAST.

6. The State Board of Community Colleges should study the feasibility of establishing and distributing to the public schools and parents a list of recommended courses that should be taken before entry into the associate in arts degree program. These course guidelines should be used in conjunction with entry-level placement test scores to determine student placement. The college preparatory instruction program should be expanded to provide the precollege work necessary for those students who are not prepared for college-level instruction.

7. Community colleges and state universities should be required to use entry-level placement testing results and course deficiencies on high school transcripts to identify the students who are at risk of failing the CLAST and assign such students to college preparatory instruction.

8. Each postsecondary institution should offer an optional non-credit CLAST preparation course (similar to the SAT preparation courses for high school students), especially for first-time test-takers, to help students understand the CLAST and prepare for it.

9. Postsecondary institutions should actively encourage students to take the CLAST as early as possible for diagnostic purposes and to provide the maximum number of opportunities for students to take the CLAST.

10. The postsecondary institutions should mandate that students who do not pass the CLAST enroll in programs specifically designed to help the students learn the CLAST skills. Students who do not participate in this program should be prohibited from registering in subsequent semesters.

11. The postsecondary institutions should provide faculty development programs to help those faculty members providing CLAST related instruction better meet the needs of students at risk of failing the CLAST.

12. The postsecondary institutions should provide successful minority role models for students and hire more minority faculty members.

13. The postsecondary institutions should involve their faculty members providing CLAST related instruction in the development of plans and programs to improve minority student performance on the CLAST. The institutions should provide rewards and recognition to encourage faculty efforts to improve minority student achievement.

14. Each postsecondary institution should develop effective systems of accountability to ensure that students and faculty know what the CLAST skills are and where they are taught in the curriculum.

15. The postsecondary institutions should hold their faculty members providing CLAST related instruction accountable for effectively teaching the CLAST skills and assisting students to achieve these skills.

16. The postsecondary institutions should plan and implement in cooperation with public school districts that are within their service areas meetings with guidance counselors, district subject area supervisors in English and Mathematics, and representative teachers from these disciplines to explain the CLAST, the skills and coursework which students need in order to pass, the ramifications of failing the CLAST, and the support services that are available for students who have failed.

Testing and Reporting

Currently, the Department of Education oversees a student testing program that begins in the elementary schools and extends into the higher education system. The State Student Assessment Tests (SSAT) and the CLAST are both a part of that program. Even though the grade levels and degree levels of our educational institutions represent a continuum for the students who go through them, that same philosophy has not existed in the testing program.

Many of the tests which have either been developed by the State of Florida or adopted by the State for use in Florida were approved for a specific purpose. For example, the CLAST is used to determine eligibility to receive the associate in arts degree and/or to progress to the upper-division in a state university. Unfortunately, little consideration has been given to how the skills and the level of achievement being tested relate to other tests. Further, the student obtains no information from the SSAT about their skill level as it relates to the requirements of the college level. Because of this lack, parents and students may be misled by test scores and student grades (in courses not considered to be part of a college preparatory curriculum) which seem to indicate that the student is adequately prepared for college-level work. The reality strikes when a student is denied admission to a state university in Florida, or fails to pass the entry-level placement tests upon entering a community college.

The minimum cut-off scores used for placement in our community colleges and state universities are specified in State Board of Education rule. The postsecondary institutions may use higher scores or combine scores with other indicators, such as grade-point average or courses taken in high school, to determine student placement in mathematics, reading, and writing. Yet, there is concern that the placement tests and the cut-off scores used do not relate well to the CLAST skills. Thus, the entry-level placement testing program is not as useful as it might be in predicting success or identifying potential weaknesses in the CLAST skills.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends the following:

1. **The Department of Education should develop a program to test students in high school to determine how well the student is prepared in the skills necessary for college-level work and to enter the world of work. This testing should be done in time for the student to work on the improvement of these skills prior to high school graduation.**

2. **The Department of Education should re-examine the cut-off scores for the entry-level placement tests with reference to their ability to predict performance on the CLAST.**

On the CLAST itself, the Task Force has recommended that postsecondary institutions and students use the test more diagnostically. This may be particularly helpful for minority students since other tests do not provide a good evaluation of skill level, and these students may not have had the benefit of a support environment that would provide other indicators. Therefore, the Task Force recommends that:

1. **Students should be encouraged to take the CLAST as soon as possible for diagnostic purposes. Test administration procedures should be modified to facilitate and encourage this objective both for the institutions administering the test and the students who are taking it.**

2. **First-time test-takers should be allowed the option of taking all four subtests of the CLAST, the Mathematics subtest only, or the Communications subtests (Reading, English Language Skills, and Essay) only.**

If the institutions and the students are to be encouraged to use the CLAST developmentally, the reporting of the students' scores and the publishing of institutional success rates should be modified. It is

important to note that the Task Force endorses the concept of public accountability and the use of the CLAST scores as an indicator of student success. Currently, the compilation of test results which is prepared and distributed to the postsecondary institutions and the public emphasizes the success of first-time test-takers. As was shown earlier in this report, reporting the results of first-time takers of the CLAST does not accurately portray total student performance. Black students, in particular, are depicted negatively on the basis of first-time test results, but the performance of this group improves significantly upon retaking the test.

With the advent of the diagnostic use of the CLAST, reporting results for first-time test-takers will become less relevant and potentially more damaging to the institutions and students we are attempting to help. Therefore, the Department of Education should revise the test results report released to the public as an accountability "scorecard." Rather than basing the report on the scores of first-time test-takers, the report should be based on the scores of those students who have completed approximately half of their baccalaureate studies, 60 credit hours. This framework is very meaningful for the student because it is the point at which the associate in arts degree is granted and/or the student can be considered for admission to the upper-division of a state university. This reporting format is also more appropriate for the general public, who generally view the CLAST as a rising-junior test and do not understand that the scores of first-time test-takers do not represent a group of sophomores who are about to become juniors in college.

Also, this reporting approach makes sense for the community colleges and state universities because the students for whom they are being held accountable are students who have completed whatever lower-division program of studies the institution provides. As it is now, the postsecondary institutions can truthfully claim that many students for whom they are being held accountable may or may not have taken any of the courses that prepare them for the CLAST. They may even be students who have failed the entry-level placement tests and been referred to college preparatory instruction, but have not yet enrolled in college preparatory instruction. In short, the reporting system is not very functional for the purpose for which it was intended and certainly not for the purpose of describing minority student performance accurately.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends that:

1. **The Department of Education Office of Assessment, Testing, and Evaluation should provide for each academic term and for the academic year a report on the number of students in each public postsecondary institution having completed 60 credit hours of college-level coursework, the number and percentage of these students who passed each of the four subtests of the CLAST, and the number and percentage of those who passed one, two, three and all four subtests. This information should be reported by race and gender and for all students. These reports should be distributed to each postsecondary institution, key education policymakers, the press, and interested parties.**

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Appendix

Task Force Members

Member	Representing
Dr. Willis N. Holcombe (Chairperson) President Broward Community College 225 East Las Olas Boulevard Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33301 (305) 761-7444 SUNCOM 470-7401	Articulation Coordinating Committee (Community Colleges)
Dr. Jose Alvarado Member, Miami-Dade Community College Board of Trustees 1390 Brickell Avenue, Suite 401 Miami, Florida 33131 (305) 372-3646	Community College Board of Trustees
Dr. Alan G. Fickett 1505 East Colonial Drive Suite 200 Orlando, Florida 32803 (407) 896-0594	Postsecondary Education Planning Commission
Dr. Richard Hogg Vice President for Academic Affairs Florida A & M University Tallahassee, Florida 32307 (904) 599-3276 SUNCOM 286-3276	Articulation Coordinating Committee (State Universities)
Dr. Ralph Hogges 15630 Southwest 109th Avenue Miami, Florida 33157 (305) 625-4141	Postsecondary Education Planning Commission
Mr. Cecil Keene Post Office Box 13489 St. Petersburg, Florida 33733 (813) 791-2509 SUNCOM 584-2509	Board of Regents
Mrs. Gwendolyn J. Kidney Executive Director Division of Student Services Dade County School District 1450 N. E. 2nd Avenue Room 733 Miami, Florida 33132 (305) 376-1811 SUNCOM 432-1811	Articulation Coordinating Committee (Public Schools)
Dr. Sydel B. LeGrande 9125 Northeast Second Avenue Miami Shores, Florida 33138 (305) 756-7930	State Board of Communiuty Colleges

Task Force Members

Member	Representing
Dr. Paul C. Parker Chief, Bureau of Program Support and Services Department of Education 1314 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-0555 SUNCOM 278-0555	Articulation Coordinating Committee (Community Colleges)
Dr. Bill Gene Smith Chairman Highlands County School Board 5253 Huckleberry Lake Drive Sebring, Florida 33870 (813) 385-3569	Public School Boards
Dr. Bob Stakenas Professor, Department of Educational Leadership Florida State University 113 Stone Building Tallahassee, Florida 32306 (904) 644-6777 SUNCOM 284-6777	Articulation Coordinating Committee's Standing Committee on Student Achievement
Dr. Augustus B. Turnbull, III Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Florida State University Tallahassee, Florida 32306 (904) 644-1816 SUNCOM 284-1816	Articulation Coordinating Committee (State Universities)
Dr. Jeaninne Webb Director Office of Instructional Resources University of Florida Gainesville, Florida 32611 (904) 392-0365 SUNCOM 622-0365	Articulation Coordinating Committee's Standing Committee on Alternative Ways of Earning Credit
Mr. Gene Witt Superintendent Manatee County School District 215 Manatee Avenue Bradenton, Florida 34205 (813) 746-5171 SUNCOM 536-1011	Articulation Coordinating Committee (Public Schools)

Resource Staff

Staff	Representing
Dr. Frederick W. Atherton Director, Academic and Professional Education Programs Division of Community Colleges Florida Department of Education 1314 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-0555 SUNCOM 278-0555	Community Colleges
Ms. Ida Baker Director Division of Human Resource Development Florida Department of Education 314 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-5724 SUNCOM 278-5724	Advisory Committee on Education of Blacks
Dr. Cheryl Blanco Education Policy Director Postsecondary Education Planning Commission 210 Collins Building Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-7894 SUNCOM 278-7894	Postsecondary Education Planning Commission
Mr. Taylor Cullar Coordinator, Office of Postsecondary Education Coordination Florida Department of Education 1401 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-6402 SUNCOM 278-6402	Commissioner's Office
Dr. Patrick H. Dallet Assistant Executive Director Postsecondary Education Planning Commission 210 Collins Building Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-7894 SUNCOM 278-7894	Postsecondary Education Planning Commission
Dr. Thomas H. Fisher Administrator, Assessment, Testing and Evaluation Section Division of Public Schools Florida Department of Education 714 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-8198 SUNCOM 278-8198	CLAST Office

Resource Staff

Staff	Representing
Ms. Deloris Massey Coordinator, Student Development Division of Community Colleges Florida Department of Education 1314 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-1721 SUNCOM 278-1721	Community Colleges
Dr. Bruce Mitchell Director, Academic Programs Research Division of Universities Florida Department of Education 1548 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-7702 SUNCOM 278-7702	State Universities
Dr. Linda H. Owens Director, Office of Postsecondary Education Coordination Florida Department of Education 1401 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-6402 SUNCOM 278-6402	Commissioner's Office
Dr. Charles Sherwood Chief, Elementary and Secondary Education Division of Public Schools Florida Department of Education 348 Florida Education Center Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 (904) 488-5011 SUNCOM 278-5011	Public Schools

Task Force Meeting Dates

Dates	Location
October 16, 1989	Tallahassee, Florida
November 9, 1989	Tallahassee, Florida
November 20, 1989	Tallahassee, Florida

Minimum Standards of College-Level Communication and Computation Skills (Rule 6A-10.0312, FAC)

(1) The following scale scores on the College-Level Academic Skills Test define the minimum levels of attainment of the communication and computation skills included in Rule 6A-10.0310, FAC, that are required on each subtest during each of the designated periods of time to satisfy the minimum standards of the State Board of Education.

(a) Reading. From August 1, 1984, through July 31, 1986, the scale score shall be 260. From August 1, 1986 through July 31, 1989, the scale score shall be 270. Beginning August 1, 1989, the scale score shall be 295.

(b) Writing. From August 1, 1984, through July 31, 1986, the scale score shall be 265. From August 1, 1986 through July 31, 1989, the scale score shall be 270. Beginning August 1, 1989, the scale score shall be 295.

(c) Computation. From August 1, 1984, through July 31, 1986, the scale score shall be 260. From August 1, 1986 through July 31, 1989, the scale score shall be 275. From August 1, 1989, through July 31, 1990, the scale score shall be 285. Beginning on August 1, 1990, the scale score shall be 295.

(d) Essay. From August 1, 1984, through July 31, 1990, the scale score shall be 4. Beginning on August 1, 1990, the scale score shall be 5.

(e) The scale scores described in this rule shall be equivalent to those specified in Rule 6A-10.0311(3), FAC.

(2) The Commissioner shall approve procedures for reviewing the minimum standards and shall recommend changes in the minimum standards to adjust to changes in the level of attainment of communication and computation skills being achieved by students in community colleges and state universities and to changes in the definition of the college-level skills included in Rule 6A-10.0310, FAC.

Specific Authority 229.053 (1) (2) (d), 240.107 (4) FS. Law Implemented 229.053 (2) (d), 240.233 (6), 240.239 (3), 240.325 (3), 240.3215 (2) FS. History - New 9-3-81, amended 9-29-82, 3-28-84, Formerly 6A-10.312, amended 4-13-88, 8-8-89.

State of Florida
Department of Education
Tallahassee, Florida
Betty Castor, Commissioner
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For more information
or to obtain copies of the report, please contact:

Office of Postsecondary Education Coordination
Florida Department of Education
1401 Florida Education Center
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400